

Sermon 2, What He Gave, What He'll Give, 2 Peter 1:1-2

Proposition: This letter, which really is by Peter, is premised on what Christ has already given every Christian and what Christ will give every Christian.

- I. The Author: Simeon Peter, v. 1a
- II. What Every Christian Has, v. 1b-c
 - A. An Apostolic Faith, v. 1b
 1. Faith Is a Gift from God
 2. God Honors Faith
 - B. A Righteous God and Savior, v. 1c
 1. Christ's righteousness is the source of our faith
 2. Christ is our God
 3. Christ is our Savior
- III. What Every Christian Needs: The Knowledge of Christ, v. 2
 - A. Coming to know Him (conversion)
 - B. Being in relationship with Him (union with Christ)
 - C. Being changed by knowing Him (sanctification)
 1. Growth in grace
 2. Growth in peace

Introduction

Dearly beloved congregation of our Lord Jesus Christ, I've been getting a lot of calls recently from people who want to sell me replacement windows. They know that I'm a homeowner — and by definition, every homeowner has a home. Their pitch is premised on the certainty of what I have — I'm a homeowner. Their typical move, then, is to try to tell me how necessary these replacement windows actually are. Their move is from what every homeowner has to what every homeowner needs. Well, we will look together this evening at the greeting of Peter's second letter. What we'll see is that this letter is premised on what every Christian has and what every Christian needs. Here, at the beginning of his letter, Peter tells us what every Christian has — faith and a righteous God and Savior — and moves from that to what every Christian needs. Indeed, his whole letter exemplifies this proclamation of what every Christian has and then the corresponding move to what every Christian needs. Every Christian has Christ; therefore (as we saw last week) every Christian needs the knowledge of Christ. Every Christian has faith, and therefore every Christian needs grace and peace in every facet of knowing Christ.

I. The Author: Simeon Peter, v. 1a

Before we really get into the meat of this letter, let's talk for a moment about the author. He calls himself Simeon Peter, in a nod to his Jewish heritage. Simeon was apparently the most popular

boy's name in first-century Palestine, because it fit so well with a Jewish heritage (Simeon, son of Jacob, one of the twelve patriarchs!) and yet was also very accessible to Greek-speakers as the name "Simon." What's not to like? Yet, as we know, Simeon or Simon was dubbed "the Rock" by Jesus Himself, who declared that because of his confession of Jesus' Messiahship, he would be called "Peter," the Greek word for "Rock." He was also, therefore, known in Aramaic as "Cephas," yet another words for "Rock." Here he identifies himself as Simeon Peter, both Greek and Jewish, and as a slave and apostle of Jesus Christ.

Now, to be a slave of Jesus Christ was not without a certain dignity, in that though slaves have no authority, yet something of their masters' aura clings to them. To be the president's cook or housemaid is something; to be the slave of Jesus Christ is not only a title of humility, but of honor. To be an apostle of Jesus is to be sent by Him for a particular task — the task, as we know, of founding the church, the very church which Jesus said He would build on Peter and his confession that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of the Living God.

Why does it matter who this letter is from? In one sense, of course, humanly speaking it doesn't, provided that the letter is from God. Just as you don't care which servers and wires your email came through, provided that it arrives, so the human author of any book of Scripture is not as important as the divine author. Nonetheless, we confess that the prophets spoke for God — and that the apostles did so as well. This book is from God because it is from Simeon Peter, an apostle sent by Christ to build the church. This book is from Christ to us through Peter the apostle, and therefore it is a piece of writing to which we ought to listen carefully. Indeed, we must fix our attention on this book as we would on the single source of light in a dark cave. The Scripture is a lamp to our feet and a light to our path, and this word from God to us through Peter is a key part of its radiance.

II. What Every Christian Has

Well, Peter doesn't waste much time introducing himself, and neither will I. You know who he is, and if you don't, read the gospels, where you will meet him as quite a forthright character. After giving his name and the briefest of summaries of his qualifications, he turns directly to describing what every Christian has. These characteristics of his recipients are mentioned because they are true of all Christians.

A. An Apostolic Faith, v. 1b

First of all, all Christians have an apostolic faith — a faith equal to Peter's own apostolic faith.

1. Faith Is a Gift from God

Now, this faith is a gift from God. It is a faith that has been allocated or apportioned to the recipients, and thus is not something they created on their own but rather must be something they received. Brothers and sisters, if you are a Christian this morning that means that you have received the gift of faith from God Himself. So if you're having trouble trusting God, what do you do? Try harder? Well, certainly effort is not inimical to the Christian life. Effort is a key part of trusting God. But effort is not the foundation of faith. Faith begins as God's gift to and for His people. The faith you have was allocated to you by God. This means, of course, that if you are

troubled by a lack of faith you ought to ask God for more faith! Don't just say, "There's nothing I can do; faith is a gift I didn't get." Ask God to give you more faith — and thank Him for the faith you've already received. You have all the faith you need to be a faithful servant of Christ today, as v. 3 says.

Your salvation begins in God's gift to you of the faith to receive it. Don't waste that gift.

2. God Honors Faith

But notice the amazing thing here: Not only does God give faith; He honors it! In fact, He honors it equally with the apostles' faith. This is a "faith of equal standing" with Peter's, as the ESV paraphrases. The Greek word in the original, though, is "equal honor." Our culture has little time for notions of honor and shame; we have slut parades, and we laugh at honor (and, as C.S. Lewis adds, we are shocked to find traitors in our midst). But honor was a key category in the late antique world in which Peter wrote. And thus, Peter lets you know that God honors the faith which you have. Not only does He honor it; He honors it equally with the faith of an apostle.

God will never mock you for your faith! He will never deride or belittle your faith! Your faith is of equal honor with John's, Paul's, and Peter's. Your little acts of believing, that sometimes seem pitiful even to you, are just as honorable in His sight as the mighty faith of Paul raising the dead or Abraham preparing to sacrifice his only son.

That means, brothers and sisters, that you are not allowed to dishonor and despise your own faith. God Himself honors it. Equally, we are not allowed to dishonor and despise the faith of our Christian brothers and sisters. God Himself honors it. Peter didn't look down on the faith of these people, even though they were in danger from false prophets and, perhaps, even in danger of becoming false prophets themselves. He honored them by declaring that in God's sight their faith was every bit as honorable as his own.

B. A Righteous God and Savior, v. 1c

But not only does every Christian have a faith of equal honor with the apostles'. Every Christian also has a righteous God and Savior.

1. Christ's righteousness is the source of our faith

Now, the syntax here is somewhat ambiguous. There are two ways to look at it. The first is that Peter is saying that we have received faith by the righteousness of Christ. In this sense, of course, Peter would be saying what Paul so heavily emphasized in his letters — that through Christ's saving righteousness, expressed in His life, death, and resurrection — you and I have received saving faith and every other gift of union with Christ. Our salvation is the outworking of the righteous actions of Jesus Christ by which He worked for our salvation.

Yet another potential sense is this: It is through the fairness of Christ that our faith is honored just as much as the apostles'. He is just, righteous, fair, and no respecter of persons. The fact that Paul the apostle planted so many churches and wrote so many letters and did so much for the kingdom does not make his faith any more honored in God's sight than yours or mine. It is through the absolute fairness of Christ that every Christian's faith receives equal honor.

I can't choose between these interpretations, because both are true. We really are saved by Christ's righteousness! And at the same time, we really are given equal honor with the apostles because Christ is always completely and entirely fair to us. Both are correct; both are true; and both are very nourishing to our faith this evening.

Are you afraid that you're a second-class Christian? The fairness of God will not let you be one. Are you a sinner who can't save himself? The righteousness of Christ is yours if only you trust Him. This is the Gospel message. Every Christian has faith; every Christian has equally honorable faith given by a righteous God and Savior.

2. Christ is our God

For that, brothers and sisters, is what Christ is. He is not only God's anointed one, as the word "Christ" indicates. He is also our God. This is one of the few places in the NT where Jesus is directly called "God." This is not some lower-class God, some generated deity which is not to be put in the same class as the Father's deity. This divinity Jesus is and has is the same divinity the Father is and has. Your salvation is a result of Christ's deity. In Himself, in one person, He brought together humanity and deity, God and men.

Why is it important to know that Christ is our God? For purposes of worship! We need to know that He is God if we are to worship Him rightly, theologize about Him rightly, know Him rightly. Remember, as we saw last week and as we are about to see in the next verse, what every Christian needs is the knowledge of Christ. If we don't know that Jesus is God, how could we say that we know Him? Brothers and sisters, it is tremendously important that we know who Jesus is. It's important in itself, for purely informational purposes. It's important for our worship. And it's important for the Christian life, which consists of knowing Christ.

Is Jesus Christ your God? That is the core and hallmark of being a Christian.

3. Christ is our Savior

Yet not only is He our God; He is our Savior. That means that He has delivered us from the wrath of God, the power of sin, and the curse of corruption that is in the world. He has saved us comprehensively, from every threat and danger. That salvation is not yet perfectly ours in some key ways, as we will see in the next verse and indeed throughout this book. And yet in one key way it is perfectly ours, for Christ is ours. Peter describes Him with that first-person plural possessive pronoun. Jesus is *our* God and *our* Savior — the God and Savior who belongs to us, who is in relationship with us. And therefore, though we will be saved in fullness at the end, even before that we are completely saved and totally safe so long as Jesus Christ is our savior. If He is yours, is your Savior, then you have nothing to fear. He will save you to the uttermost.

III. What Every Christian Needs: The Knowledge of Christ, v. 2

Well, every Christian has the gift of faith and has Christ for God and Savior. But every Christian needs the knowledge of Christ. To know Christ is to have grace and peace multiplied to you. Grace, remember, is God's unmerited favor. Peace is the union of the appetite's inclinations and unity of purpose and agency with the people around you. Peter blesses his readers with both grace and peace.

Let me ask you this: Do you genuinely expect to get more grace and peace from reading this book than from other activities? Which one will give you more grace and peace: Reading 2 Peter or doing a puzzle/going hunting/ reading a novel/watching your favorite film/eating at a nice restaurant? Peter clearly believes that his letter will be a means God uses to grant grace and peace to us. So if you want those things (and if you're a believer, you do want them), pay attention to the words of this letter.

But Peter doesn't stop there. Unlike any other NT author, he adds the important truth that grace and peace come to us through the knowledge of God and Christ. This is not the omniscience that God and Christ have. Rather, it is our personal knowledge of these two divine persons, the Father and the Son. We grow in grace and peace through knowing Christ. Indeed, as we saw last week, this ties back in to listening to 2 Peter as Scripture. Peter's big point in this letter is that we can know Jesus better by listening to Scripture. And this letter is part of Scripture, and thus a means to get to know Jesus better. To know Him and His father is eternal life.

A. Coming to know Him (conversion)

Well, I want to focus for a moment on the three different aspects of knowing Christ that we can think about. The first of these aspects is the aspect of coming to know Christ, or conversion. The moment when our hearts are changed, when we are justified and brought into union with Christ, is the moment when we begin to know Christ. It is the moment when grace and peace first come to us as believers. It is the moment of salvation or conversion or regeneration (the Bible uses all three terms). Every Christian, of course, needs to have been converted and needs to continue being converted away from sin and towards a holy life in union with Christ.

B. Being in relationship with Him (union with Christ)

And indeed, the aspect of ongoing relationship is very important. We are united to Christ. We know Him personally, as personal friends. We "walk with Christ" by speaking to Him, listening to Him, and spending time with Him, just as we grow in relationships with people we can see.

Do you talk to Jesus? Listen to Jesus? Spend time with Jesus? This is how you come to the knowledge of Christ that every Christian needs. This letter is His word to us; read it to listen to Him and spend time with Him!

C. Being changed by knowing Him (sanctification)

Finally, though, the third aspect of growing in the knowledge of Christ lies in the result of knowing Him. A vibrant walk with Christ must and will have ethical consequences, as Peter will talk about throughout this letter. The two ethical consequences highlighted in this verse, though, are grace and peace.

1. Growth in grace

You see, it is inconceivable that you could grow in knowing Christ without become more like Him. Peter, who walked with Christ in person through His earthly ministry, emphasizes this here. Grace is not just God's attitude toward you; it is also an ethical quality. If you are actually growing in the knowledge of Christ, then you will be getting multiple times more gracious. You

will be more forgiving, more understanding, more willing to overlook faults and commit people to God's mercy in their attitudes and actions.

2. Growth in peace

Similarly, the better you know Christ the less contentious you'll be. The more you will desire to make peace like your Savior did, to draw people together in love and grace and mercy. The more you know Him, the more peace will be in your heart, in your home, and in your relationships. Whoever knows Christ ought to walk in the same way in which He walked. So brothers and sisters, you have faith. You have Jesus for your God and Savior. Now grow in knowing Him; grow in being like Him. If you do that, Peter's purpose will be fulfilled, and you will have a rich entrance into our Savior's eternal kingdom. Amen.